



# State Representative Cary Condotta



## 12th Legislative District

April 2008

Greetings to everyone in the 12th District:

Thank you for allowing me to serve as part of your 12th District legislative team again this year. The 60-day session has ended and we are back at the district office in Wenatchee. The session can best be summed up by saying, "one step forward and two steps back."

Some positive steps were taken to ensure that gang activity and public safety laws were updated to better protect families. However, we took a few steps back on fiscal responsibility and restoring a competitive business climate. The 2008 Legislature left a lot of work and unanswered questions for the 2009 Legislature.

I hope you find the information in this legislative update helpful. It's a brief snapshot on the issues I worked on as well as those issues that will impact families the most. If you need more information on these or any other issue of interest, please call my district office at (509) 664-1274.

I represent you year-round, and want you to know your input is very important and has a direct affect on the many issues we are dealing with. Thank you, again, for allowing me to serve as your state representative.

Sincerely,

Rep. Cary Condotta

### Rep. Cary Condotta

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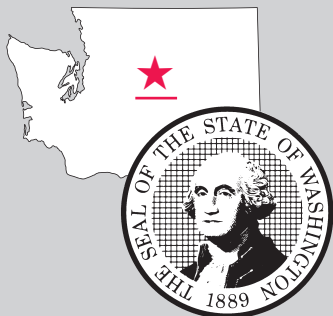
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**Committees:**

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- Finance
- Health Care and Wellness



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# 2008 Legislative Review



## SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET SPENDS MORE, FINDS NO EFFICIENCIES

Armed with a \$2 billion surplus in 2007, the majority party's temptation to spend overrode the obvious need to save for a rainy day or return some of it to taxpayers. True to form, the majority party's budget spent the surplus and more. State revenue has grown at 7.3 percent while state spending has grown at 16 percent.

This year's supplemental budget spent more than **\$290 million** above the \$33.4 billion budget passed last year. The slowing economy cut \$423 million out of state revenues in February, and we continue to spend more than we take in. According to nonpartisan budget staff, we're now facing at \$2.4 billion budget deficit in 2009, and a \$5 billion deficit in the 2011 budget.

I have continued to advocate for fiscal responsibility. State spending is out of control. The majority party has already said Washingtonians may be faced with either tax increases or program cuts in 2009 – both of which could have been avoided if budget writers prioritized spending and avoided costly new programs.

## PROPERTY TAX REFORMS DIDN'T GO FAR ENOUGH

In a special legislative session last November, I supported reinstating Initiative 747. The measure prohibits taxing districts from increasing their tax levies (property taxes) by more than 1 percent annually without voter approval.

This was a good first step to slow the growing property tax burden families are facing, but I believe we could have done more during the 2008 legislative session. Our region's property values rose 15.8 percent in 2007, and 32 percent over the last three years. Tax bills are reaching a critical level.

Despite promises by the majority party to address growing property taxes, many good proposals this year, such as a \$100,000 homestead exemption, were ignored.

We can and should do better for Washington's citizens. I will continue to work on and support legislation that lowers the tax burden on hard-working families.

## STATE MUST 'FUND THE FUNDAMENTALS' OF EDUCATION

Education is the paramount duty of the state, yet budget writers continue to punt on fixing the K-12 education funding formula. Despite 18 studies on education finance in the last decade, no solutions have been put forward to update school funding to reflect the needs of today's schools.

Part of the reason our property taxes are so high is because the state does not fund the fundamentals of education – books, transportation, special and gifted education, and classified staff salaries. This makes school districts more reliant on levy dollars to pay for the state's unfunded mandates, which increases everyone's property taxes.

The Basic Education Finance Task Force is meeting over the next several months and is required to submit a school funding plan to the 2009 Legislature. Our goals must be to get every kid across the finish line and prepare them for a lifetime of success. We must help every student succeed in the career path of his or her choice, including vocational and apprenticeship programs. We can get there, but we must begin by defining "basic education" and then fund it accordingly.



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## STATE NEEDS VISION ON TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

Our 12th District communities continue to grow, creating an even greater need for a solid transportation plan for our region and statewide. Drivers pay 36 cents per gallon in gas tax, which will rise to 37.5 cents per gallon in July. Every region of the state contributes to the transportation budget, yet delays on decisions on mega-projects in King County are siphoning off funds from other projects that are ready to go.

The plan I supported this year would build projects now, which would create savings that could be used to fund roadway projects around the state. We cannot continue to have the defining projects of our day stalled by bureaucracy, red tape and failed leadership. The public expects leadership, bold ideas and action. The House Republicans' plan has the vision to address the needs of today and the future.

## HEALTH CARE: MORE STUDIES, NO SOLUTIONS

The Legislature has spent a lot of time over the past few years discussing the rising cost of health care, but has done nothing to address it. Instead of passing meaningful health care solutions, the majority party passed a bill to commission its 16th health care study since 2005.

Since 2000, the average family's health insurance plan has increased from \$300 per month to nearly \$800. Many families find themselves choosing between health insurance and paying heating or other important bills.

Since 2003, the only major bill to be signed into law that will reduce health care costs for families was legislation I sponsored to create Health Savings Accounts (HSA). House Bill 1383, which passed in 2006, allows state employees and their dependants the option of health savings accounts. It will save the state up to \$3 million per year if only 2 percent of state employees enrolled in HSA and \$20 million per year if 10 percent enrolled when the law is fully implemented.

I believe we can do better for the people in Washington. That's why I supported legislation that would have provided immediate assistance to the uninsured, small businesses and the self-employed. House Bill 3384 would have offered affordable, flexible health care coverage. It also would have allowed a 50 percent tax credit for the self-employed. Unfortunately, the majority party rejected the legislation, instead opting for another study.

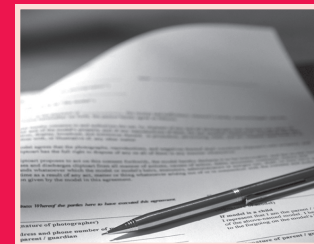
We all want health care reforms that allow everyone access to affordable and flexible health care plans. I don't think government is the best administrator of such a costly and complex program.

## PAID FAMILY LEAVE – UNFUNDED BUT MOVES FORWARD

The \$100 million program authorizing the paid family leave entitlement benefit didn't get the public debate it deserves. In lieu of having an open discussion about funding sources or administration for this benefit, the majority party decided to punt on the debate on House Bill 3305 and simply fund the \$6.2 million start-up costs of the program.

The paid leave entitlement program is slated to begin paying benefits in October 2009 to parents of newly born or adopted children. The benefit will start out at \$250 per week for five weeks. The cost for administration, implementation and benefits is estimated at more than \$100 million – despite the steep price tag, no funding source was authorized.

I could not support this legislation because it creates a system in which low-income families and single mothers could pay for an entitlement program for wealthy couples. I advocated for a means-test or other mechanism in the program to ensure the benefit actually gets to the people who need it most. Better yet, let's drop the whole thing. We can't afford it.





## JOIN ME ON A 12TH DISTRICT COMMUNITY CALL

I will be hosting a community telephone call Wednesday, April 30, 7 to 8 p.m. This new technology allows me to communicate with the entire district at one time.

To participate, call toll-free 1-866-447-5149, then enter pin # 13593

This is your opportunity to have a two-way dialogue from the comfort of your home, directly with me. You will be able to ask questions live, listen to other callers and learn more about the issues important to you. This is also a good time for me to listen to your thoughts and suggestions on how we can make Washington better. We will discuss property taxes, education and transportation just to name a few issues. And, if you want to know what the state of our business climate is, call in and find out!



Student legislative page Simone Mack poses on the House floor with Rep. Cary Condotta during her week-long stay in Olympia working in the House of Representatives.



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